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ABSTRACT

The economic, social and educational needs of rural youth in England and Wales are not being met. Rural youth are defined as all young people between the ages of 10 and 25 living in areas more than 30 miles from towns of 250,000 inhabitants, or 20 miles from towns whose population is between 50,000 and 250,000. The rapid decrease in the agricultural workforce, due to mechanisation and the increased skills level required of farm workers, has caused a high level of unemployment for young people in rural areas, leaving them little choice of high level job satisfaction in their own communities. Lack of accessibility to community resources, based on poor public transportation and decreased car ownership, has caused disadvantages to rural youth in traveling to leisure and social events, work sites, and schools. Low levels of educational attainment have come about because of disadvantaging family circumstances, such as low income, poor housing, social stress, and low educational aspirations, as well as the factor of remoteness. Serious attention from local governments and policy makers, and especially from the Youth Service, is needed so that the neglect of rural youth can be acknowledged and corrected. (JD)

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VICTIMS OF MYTH:
THE SITUATION OF RURAL YOUTH IN BRITAIN

A paper presented to the "Youth Sociology" Research Committee of the International Sociological Association March, 1981
Fredeburg, Federal Republic of Germany

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David Marsland
Leicester, U. K.

In writing about rural youth and factors which affect them, it is difficult to reach a definition which does not pre-empt some of the points which we wish to discuss. Within the literature there are clear variations of definition reflecting the particular concerns of the authors and the differing geographic and social environments of their studies. These can be summarised under four separate headings. (1) (1)

(1) Occupational - i.e. those involved in agriculture and related occupations.

(2) Cultural - those belonging to the farming or peasant class.

(3) Organisational - i.e. members of rural youth organisations, leagues, unions, etc.

(4) Environmental - i.e. those who live in the countryside regardless of membership of an organisation, profession, or tradition.

At one time these groupings, especially (1), (2) and (4) would have been almost identical, but have diverged particularly in the last 150 years. The fact that we now need to distinguish clearly between them is an indicator of the extent to which urbanisation has taken place.

In our work, and in this paper, we are concerned with all rural young people, and define rural youth in environmental or geographic terms - i.e. the young people who live in the countryside, regardless of what occupation (if any) they follow, regardless of any organisations with which they are affiliated, and regardless of whether their family traditions are based upon former agricultural working groups. To sharpen this environmental definition, to

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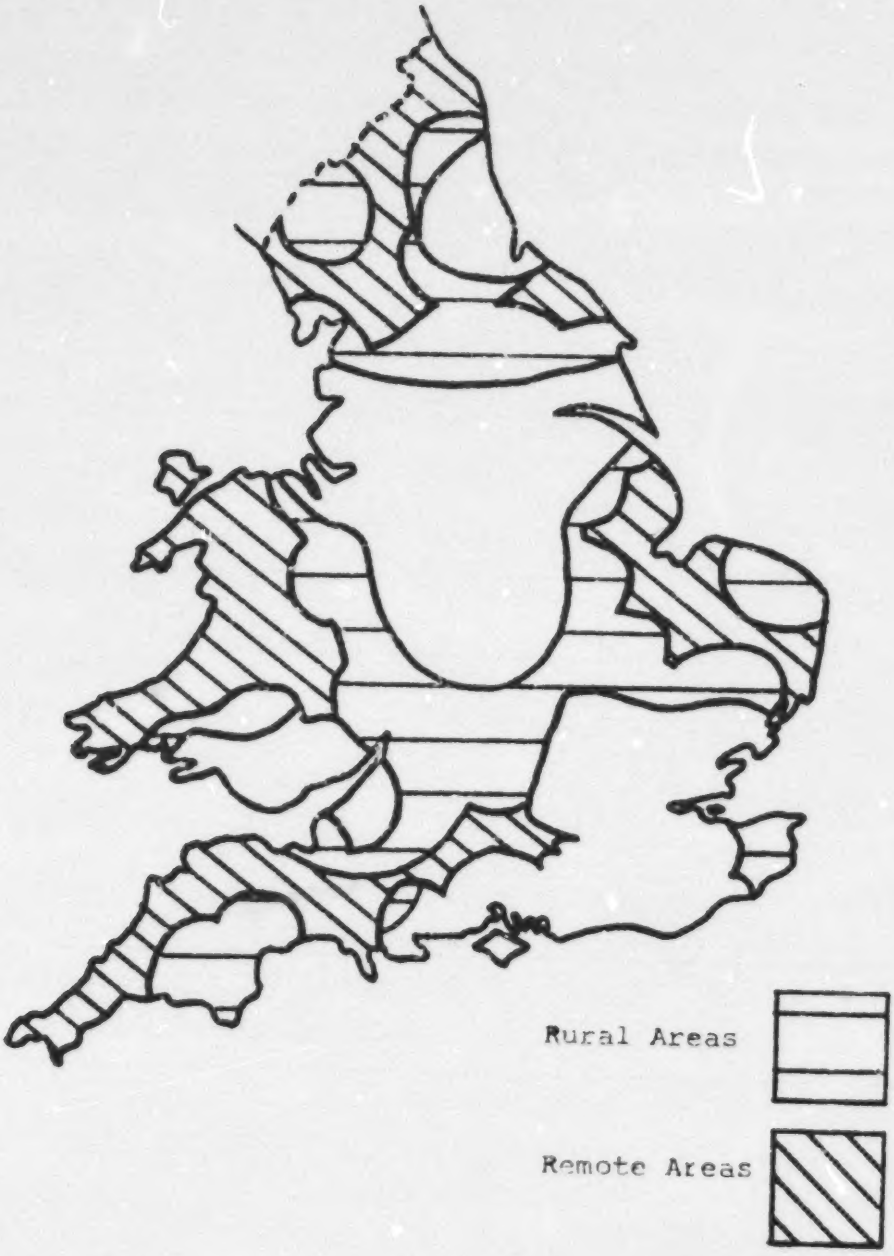

Figure 1: Rural and Remote areas of England and Wales.
Based upon Jones, Gwyn "Rural Life"
Longman 1973

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distinguish urban from rural, we have chosen the factor of access or lack of access to larger towns or conurbations.

Figure 1 shows how England and Wales could be divided using this concept of rurality - shaded areas indicate regions which are either 30 miles (48 kilometres) from towns of over 250,000 inhabitants, or 20 miles (32 kilometres) from towns of 50,000 to 250,000 inhabitants. (2) With "rural" defined in this way, we define 'youth' for our purposes, as young people between the ages of 10 and 25 years. (2)

To sum up, we define rural youth as all those young people between the ages of 10 and 25 years living in areas more than 30 miles (48 kilometres) from towns of 250,000 inhabitants, or 20 miles (32 kilometres) from towns whose population is between 50,000 and 250,000 inhabitants. (3) (3)

THE RAPID DECREASE IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE

Traditional rural studies have commonly equated people of rural areas with farming communities, but in England and Wales such identification is not possible. For in spite of being the predominant user of space, Agriculture now employs a very small workforce (see Figure 2). As a result of mechanisation, the use of chemical fertilisers and sprays, and intensive farming methods, only 2% of the nation are now employed in Agriculture, with a further 3.5% in the secondary food-processing industries. (4) (4) Even if we focus our examination on the East Anglian Region, which is firmly within the Arable farming belt, with principally Grade I (top grade) and some Grade II (second quality) land, the proportions only rise to 8.2% for agriculture, and 6.1% in the secondary industries. (5) (5)

Britain as a whole has the lowest proportion of agricultural workers in Europe, and must be among the lowest in the world. (Figure 3)

In addition to reducing the Manpower needs of the agricultural industry, mechanisation has had another effect - that is of raising the skills level required of farm workers, so that a different style of farm worker is now required. Whereas until recently

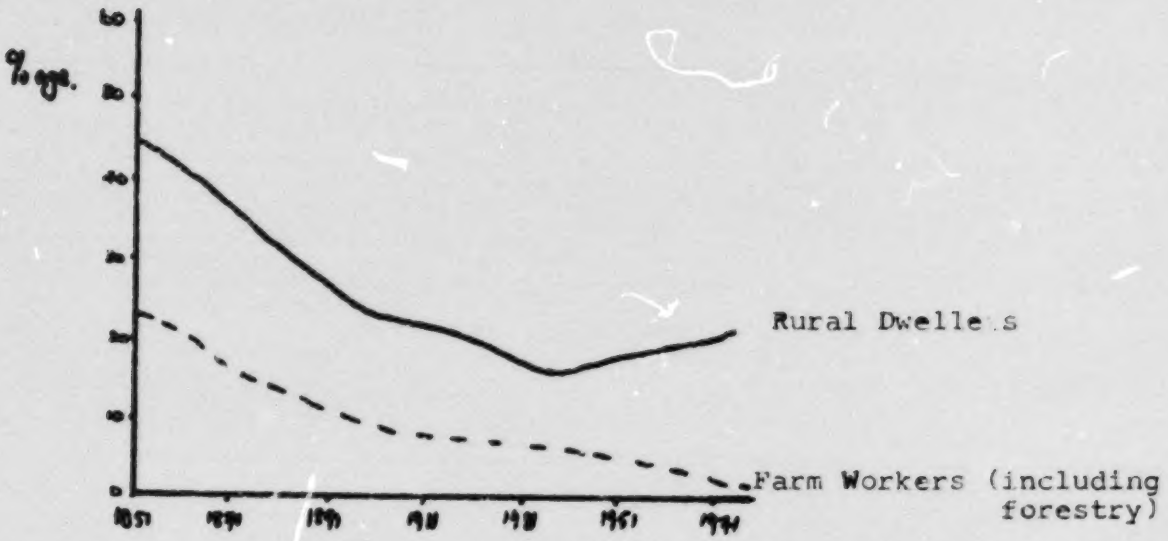

Figure 2: Proportions of rural population and farm population in England and Wales 1851 - 1975.

From Lewis, G.J. "Rural Communities" David & Charles 1979

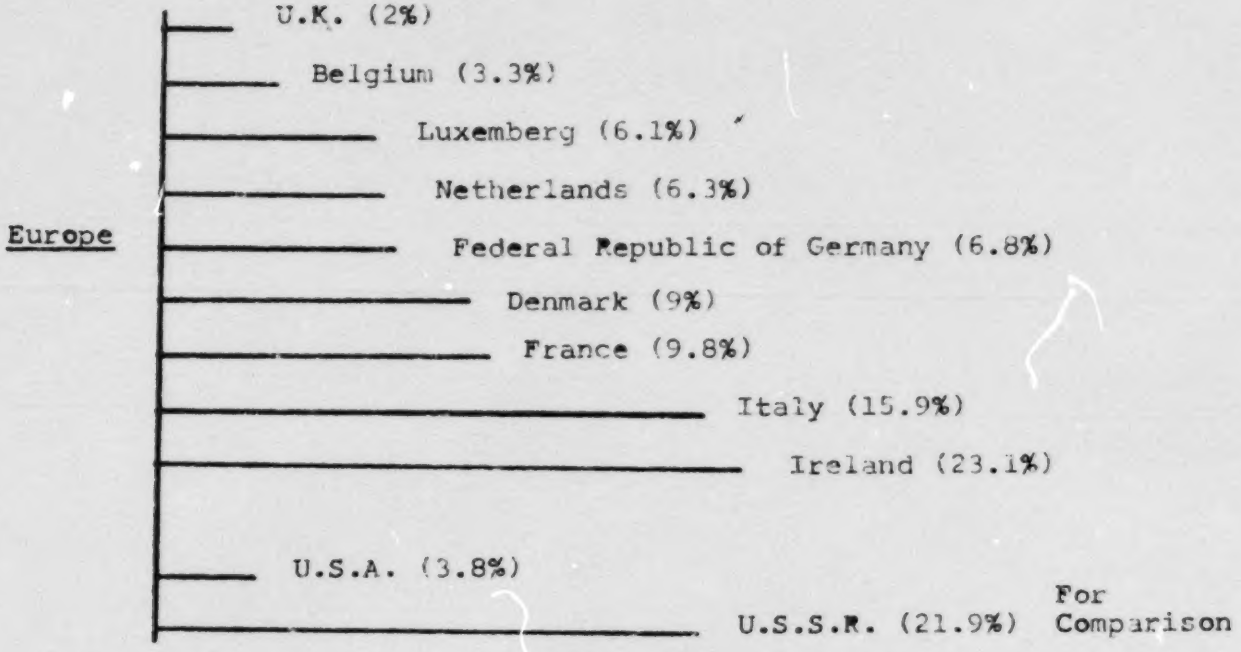

Figure 3: Percentage of Labour Force engaged in Agriculture.

From Official Statistics of the European Economic Community

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agriculture was able to offer a proportion of manual employment to the least skilled within the community, its requirements are now increasingly for semi-skilled or skilled farming operatives with mechanical training and expertise. In addition, because of the decrease in agricultural manpower, farm labouring has ceased to be a group activity, and become one which requires the worker to work in isolation. (6) (6)

As the workforce in agriculture has declined, so former farm workers have increasingly had to look elsewhere for employment. Not only former farm workers, but also the new residents of the countryside, who have moved into the countryside in recent decades for various reasons, looking for other values, for new patterns of employment, escaping the pressures of urban life, looking for cheaper housing, and so on.

As a result of all these processes of change, villages have themselves completely changed in character. Instead of being occupational villages where the majority are employed locally in agriculture and related occupations, the villages have, within one generation, become principally dormatory villages where the majority of the population commute, and seek outside the village for employment, for schooling, for social and leisure recreation. (7)

EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS FOR THE YOUNG RURAL SCHOOL LEAVER

With the recession of recent years and the present political climate, unemployment has increased greatly in Britain, as in much of the developed world. One sector which has been particularly hard hit has been the young school leavers, who, without work experience, without having developed the craft or skill abilities to any great extent, and without the survival skills of employment are finding it very difficult to break into the world of work. (8)

Various government-funded schemes have been established to combat this problem. Because of their very nature, these have mostly been situated in areas of dense population and high employment, which as a result can apply powerful political pressure. This has left young people of the more scattered rural areas, and high unemployment) with far less likelihood of obtaining a place in job

creation schemes. In addition the refusal of the civil servants (responsible for establishing the scheme) to allow travel to work to be paid from the scheme's funds, has meant that in financial terms only young people in the immediate area of employment can benefit, since the differential between the working wage on a job scheme and unemployment benefit is very low, and can be negated by the high costs of travelling to work. (9) (9)

Because preferential treatment is generally given to the politically sensitive areas, and because the tendency for employment schemes to favour the areas of concentrated population, the employment opportunities of rural youth are, in our opinion, definitely reduced.

Many rural areas especially in the South West, Wales and North have unemployment levels well above the national average. Moreover, within the large groupings which are used for the Government's statistics, there are small pockets of high unemployment, and there may also be seasonal employment variations which lead to alternating periods of employment and unemployment. (10) (10)

In human terms this can cause very real hardship. This is particularly the case to the extent that a rural unemployed young person may be the only person unemployed within his village. As a result he is cut off from the possibility of the peer-group support, which in urban areas is so important as an antidote to unemployment.

Furthermore, there are increasing indications that in certain rural areas there are significant numbers of young people who are not now signing on as unemployed, but are being kept at home, to help with domestic work in the house. (11) This applies especially for girls. (11) One commonly hears the comment "When jobs are few, its the boys who should get first choice".

Even if young people are able to get jobs, the range of jobs is very much narrower, and they are less likely to find a job which provides a high level of job satisfaction than their urban counterparts. This again is particularly true of girls, for whom employment frequently is limited to manual shopwork (stocking shelves) or clerical office work. (12) (12)

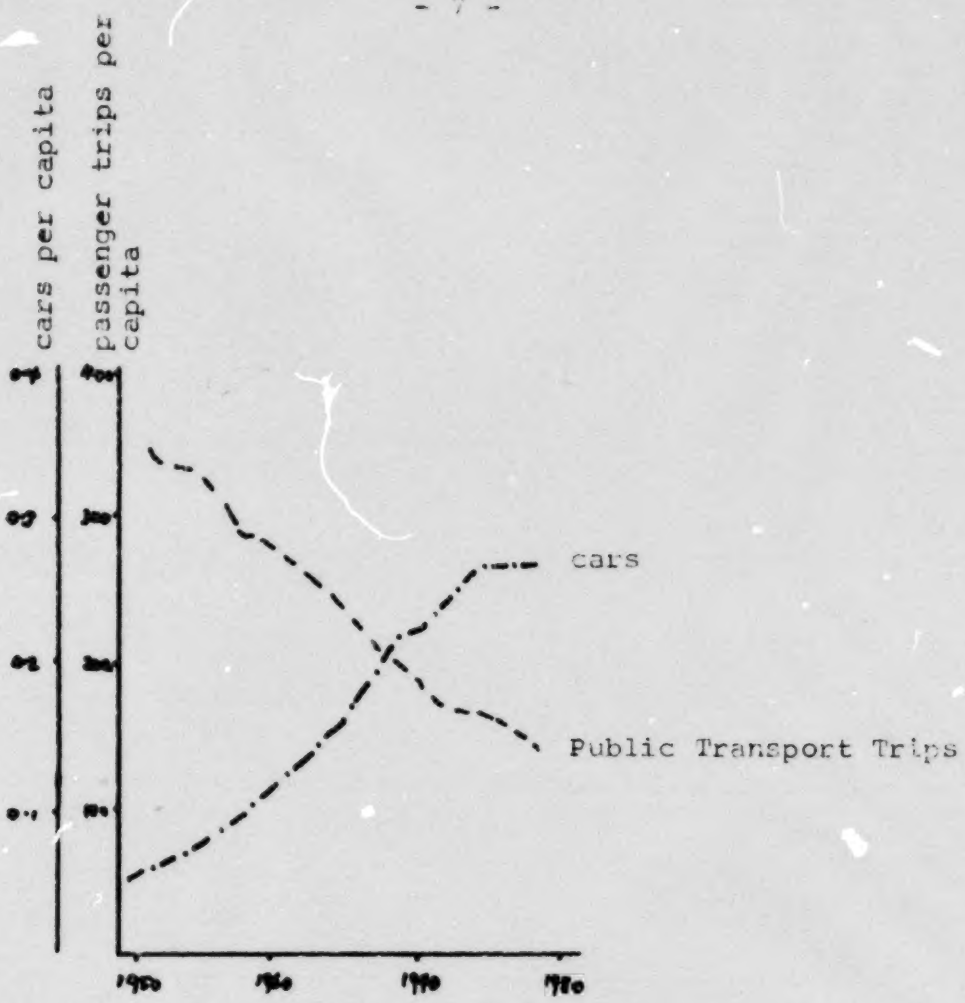

Figure 4: Car ownership and public road transport passenger trips in Great Britain.

(Based on National Travel Survey - Mitchell 1976)

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SOCIAL ISSUES AFFECTING RURAL YOUTH

Nor is it only in the area of employment where the rural young person is affected adversely. There are a number of social issues affecting young people in a way which severely disadvantages them. (13) In the following section we examine these issues in outline.

Lack of Accessibility

The biggest single factor affecting rural areas is the lack of accessibility, based upon the poor public transport. The petrol boom of the 1960's encouraged the increased use of the private car (see Figure 4) but the recession of the 1970's is causing many hardships. The rate at which private cars are purchased is levelling out, but at the same time Public Transport continues to decrease at the rate of about 1% each year. (14) The effects are not simple, (14) but causal complications interlock, ultimately to the detriment of village life.

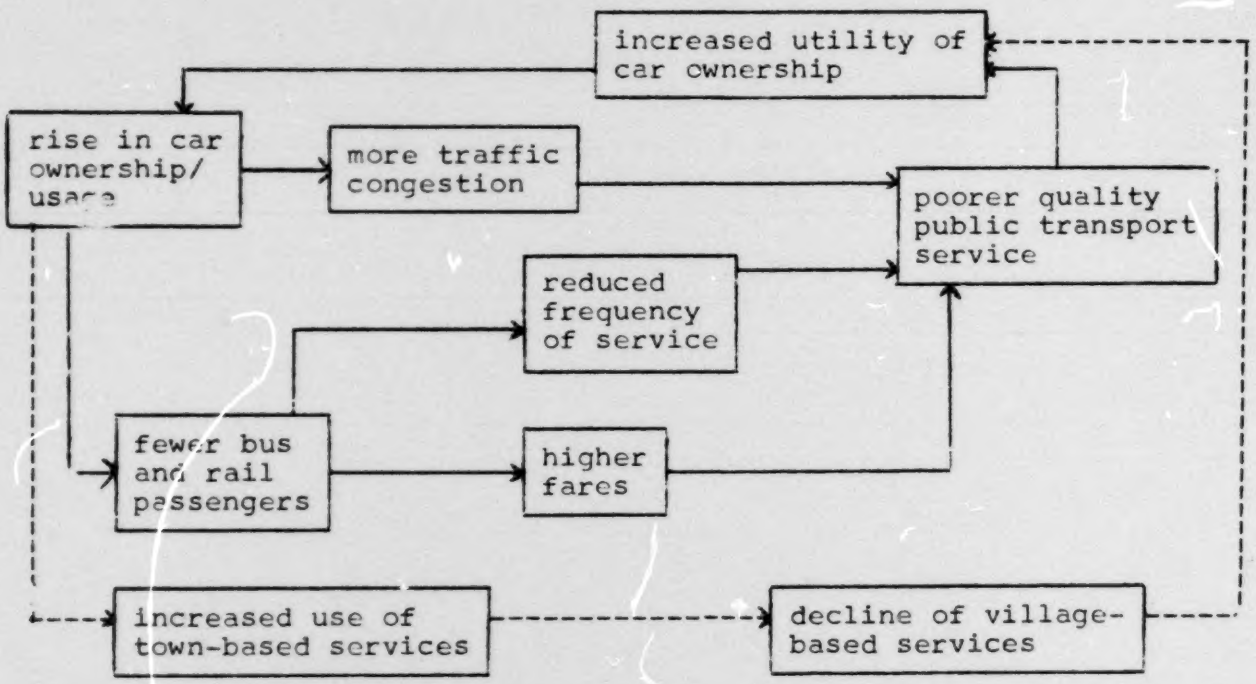
increased utility of car ownership
rise in car ownership/ usage
more traffic congestion
poorer quality public transport service
reduced frequency of service
fewer bus and rail passengers
higher fares
increased use of town-based services
decline of village-based services

Figure 5 : from Moseley, Malcolm "Accessibility: the rural challenge"

The continuing reduction in public transport hits hardest those who are most dependant upon it, the elderly, the young marrieds, and particularly young people. Such transport as does exist is usually geared to work patterns rather than leisure or domestic patterns, so frequently no evening transport exists, and only a reduced service at weekends. As a consequence, most rural young people are entirely dependant upon their parents for travel to leisure or social events, while we believe that about 12% of rural young people are from families without private transport. (15) (15)

Centralisation of Resources

Recent decades have seen an increase in the process of centralising resources.

(a) as a result of planning policy (as for example, in the re-defining of a school usages following a policy of change to comprehensive education, so that schools now have much larger catchment areas (250 square miles or 640 square kilometers) in the case of the local school for one of the author's homes.)

or

(b) as a result of economic factors resulting in the closure of rural facilities. (16) (16)

Although sociologists and rural planners refer to this process as centralisation of resources, this is in reality a confusing title since in practice there is not one focus or centre, but various foci, each one offering different resources. Figure 6 shows a typical Suffolk village studied by one of the authors, and the journeys necessary for various facilities or resources sought by young people. It is clear that a balanced life (social/work/school and domestic) involves a large number of differing journeys, and the difficulties can be very acute when combined with poor public transport.

Research has examined the distances which rural people would be prepared to travel for various facilities. (17) This is represented (17) in Figure 7. Looking at those facilities sought by young people, we can see from this that although they are prepared to travel up to about 13 miles (21 kilometers) for the secondary facilities of cinema, dancehall or discoteque, their need for primary facilities of youth club, and Church or village hall, or community centre, was

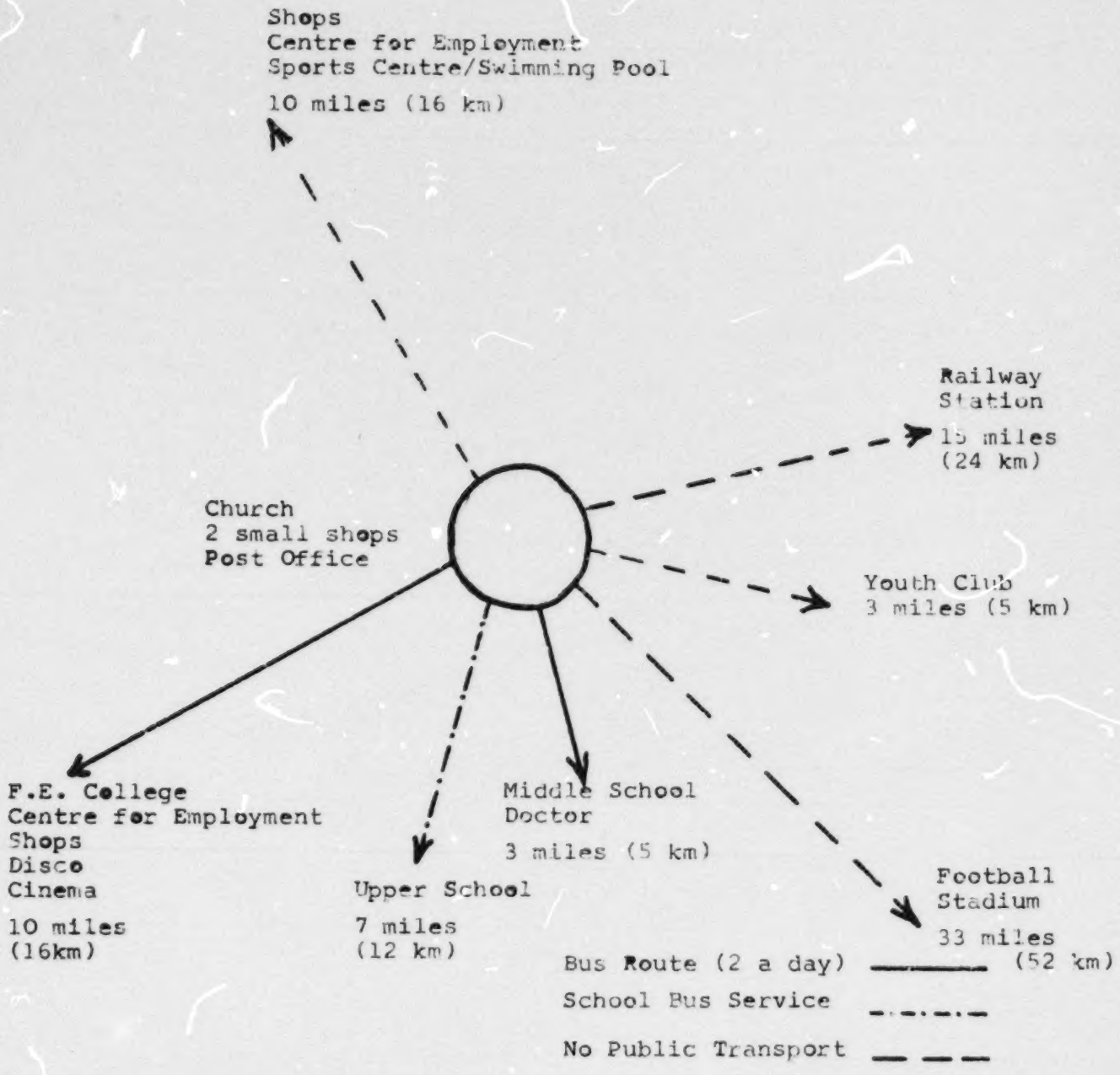

Figure 6: Resources sought by Young People from one Suffolk Village

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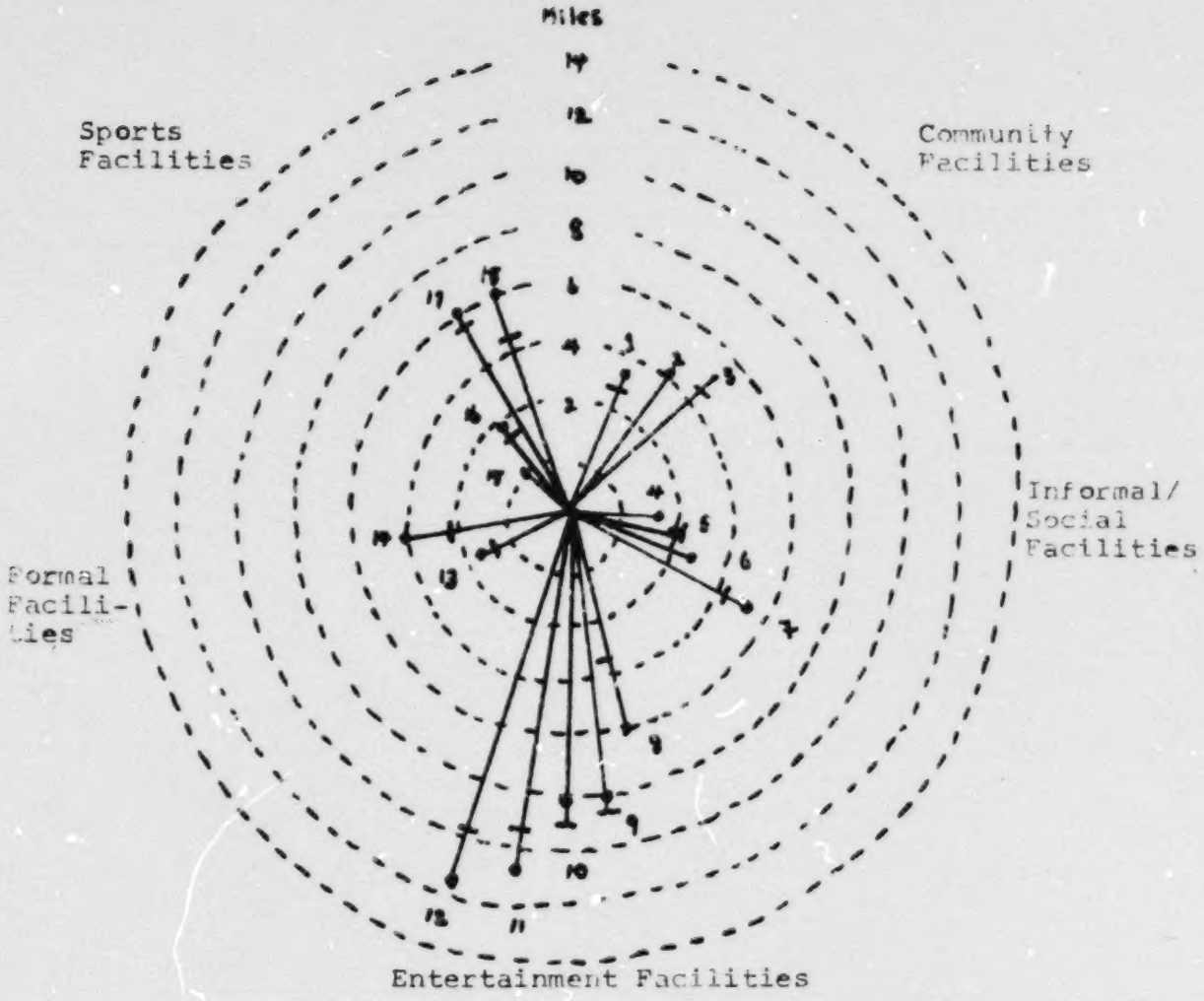

1. Community Centre
2. Church Hall
3. Village Hall
4. Old Folks Facilities
5. Youth Club
6. Cafe
7. Restaurant
8. Bingo Hall
9. Cinema
10. Dance Hall
11. Discotheque
12. Theatre
13. Playschool
14. Library
15. Children's Play Area
16. Playing Field
17. Squash Court
18. Swimming Pool

with access to vehicle

without access to vehicle

Figure 7: Facilities needed : distance relationships

From "Leisure and Rural Society"
Leisure Studies Association 1979

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within six miles (10 kilometers). The statistical cusp at the point where young people are suddenly much less ready to travel to a facility occurs in other places as well. A recent study of Youth Unemployment has shown that this is the maximum distance within which young people generally look for employment. (18) (18)

From all this it is clear that if young people are to make regular use of a facility, it should be within a distance of about six miles (10 kilometers). However, this is not a consideration which is given much importance by planners and decision-makers, for many of whom size and economy are factors of greater significance than social convenience. If resources are more than six miles (10 kilometers) away from where young people live, they may well be deprived of the use of those resources.

Educational Disadvantagement

Comments from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education lead us to believe that rural children do not do so well at school and fewer of them stay on after the statutory school leaving age. The system makes it difficult for them. There are the difficulties which rural teachers experience in discouraging them from undertaking inservice training; and the lack of after-school extra-curricular activities when schools have to be run to bus timetables; the tiredness which results from commuting - over 50 miles (80 kilometers) has been recorded - while some children from very isolated areas live away from home in hostels during the school week.

"The indicators suggest that, within the broad definition of rural areas, which encompass favoured commuter villages as well as subsistance level living, there are real pockets of social disadvantage which produce the same low levels of educational attainment in school as can be readily recognised in inner city areas. The disadvantaging family circumstances include, above all, low income, and, associated with it, poor housing, social stress, and low educational aspirations. The additional rural hazard which compounds the problem is remoteness. This makes access to facilities that can compensate for educational deprivation difficult and is an obstacle to the professional renewal of the teaching profession." (19) (19)

Rural Poverty

There is well documented evidence that this exists in pockets of the countryside. (20) However, it is not only in terms of income where rural dwellers are affected financially. There are increased costs even in basic foods. Milk can cost as much as 30% more, as can bread, with the result that a weekly domestic shopping bill can be about 5% more in the country than in the town, on top of the travel costs to reach the shops. (20)

Inner City Policies

Governments of the last few years, especially the recent Labour government, 1974-79, have been very concerned to build up inner city areas and avoid the excessive urban problems which have expressed themselves in areas of high density population. Consequently millions of pounds have been poured into this, through various funding schemes. (21) (21)

We feel that this form of positive discrimination has produced flagrant inequalities, and as a result rural areas, small towns, and suburban areas have suffered greatly from governmental neglect. There is a need for government to establish a more equitable distribution of resources throughout the Regions of Britain.

CONCLUSION : TOWARDS RECOGNITION AND REMEDY

We hope that our paper demonstrates that far from being a Garden of Eden, the Countryside in Britain has more than a sufficient share of social problems. In particular young people are subjected to a whole array of difficulties, deprivations and disadvantages. These include:-

Rapidly changing patterns of employment.
A narrow range of employment opportunities.
Some high levels of unemployment.
Lack of Accessibility.
Resources only at a distance.
Educational Disadvantagement.
Poverty.
Discrimination in resource distribution.

These problems with which rural youth is faced have been increasing recently - both relatively and absolutely - by the determined focussing of governmental attention on the problems of the inner city. These areas are more fashionable, more glamorous, and pull more votes.

We believe it is time and past time for the neglect of rural youth to be acknowledged and corrected.

We expect of central government and national organisations some serious research and relevant policy making. We cannot expect increases in public expenditure (22) - but we have a right to demand the allocation to the youth of Britain's rural areas, at least their fair share. (22)

From local government, and especially from the Youth Service, we insist on the beginning of serious attention to the needs of rural youth. (23) Youthwork is at present strenuously involved in clarifying its purposes. (24) (23) (24)

The needs of rural youth must be accepted into the regular concerns of the youth service. Their needs, their rights count for as much as those of young people anywhere and everywhere.

Michael Akehurst
David Marsland

March 1981

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(1) Based upon Ziche, Joachim, "Rural Youth: a review of research literature", Commonwealth Bureau of Agricultural Economics 1976

(2) Based upon Jones, Gwyn, "Rural Life: Patterns and Processes" Longmans 1973
and Gilg, Andrew, "Countryside Planning: the first three decades 1945-76", Methuen (University Paperback) 1978

(3) It is also necessary to be clear about "urbanisation" and "modernization". We define the former to describe the process and effects of gathering people in cities and towns with the consequent social factors (i.e. housing, inner city tension, racialism, etc.); the resulting changes in land use, occupational distribution of people, economic activities, ways of life, etc; and the increasing national acceptance of urban values, customs, and priorities for resources. The latter we define as those developments in modern society following in the wake of Industrialization and Mechanization, increased social mobility, the loosening of boundaries between social classes, increase in education, etc.

(4) From 1971 National Census: Table 20 of Economic Activity Tables (Part III)

(5) Moseley, M.J. and Sant, Morgan, "Industrial Development in East Anglia", GEO Abstracts 1977

(6) Newby, Howard, "Green and Pleasant Land", Penguin Books 1979

(7) Russell, J. Anthony, "The Village in Myth and Reality", Chester House Publications 1975

(8) Manpower Services Commission, "Young People and Work", H.M.S.O. 1978
Ball, Colin and Mog, "Fit for Work?", Writers and Readers 1979
National Youth Bureau, "Out of School in What?", "Youth in Society" No. 39 Feb. 1980

(9) The contradiction exists within the scheme in that YOP (Youth Opportunities Programme) and STEP (Special Temporary)

Employment Programme) do not pay for travel to work, whereas someone can claim travel if they undertake a TOPS course (the basic training or re-training section - another part of the Government's measures against unemployment)

(10) See for example:-
Sugden, Robert, "Unskilled and unemployed in West Cumbria", University of York 1975
Moseley, Malcolm (Ed), "Social Issues in Rural Norfolk", Centre for East Anglian Studies 1978

(11) From internal reports of the Rural Youthwork Education project, to be edited for later publication, possibly in 1982, this has been observed as far apart as in Wales, Suffolk, Leicestershire and Somerset.

(12) Based upon unpublished work of the Youth Opportunities Programme in Rural Areas project and the Rural Youthwork Education project.

(13) Explored in more detail in Akehurst, Michael, "Losers on the "Rural Battlefield", in "Youth in Society" Dec. 1980.

(14) Moseley, Malcolm, "Accessibility: the rural challenge" Methuen 1979

(15) Laflin, Clare, "Lincolnshire Study" (unpublished), Campaign for Rural Youth 1978

(16) The loss of rural facilities is described fully in:-
Standing Conference of Rural Community Councils "The Decline of Rural Services", National Council for Social Services 1978

(17) Arnott, J. and Duffield, B.S., "Leisure and Community Development in Remote Rurul Areas", in "Leisure and Rural Society", Leisure Studies Association 1979

(18) Short, Claire, "A Study of the transition from School to Working Life", Youthaid 1981

(19) Watkins, Roger, "Educational Disadvantagement in Rural Areas", in J.M. Shaw (Ed) "Rural Deprivation and Planning" Chapter 7 GEO books 1979

(20) For example:-
Thomas, Ceri and Winyard, Stephen, "Rural Incomes" in J.M.Shaw "Rural Deprivation and Planning" GEO books 1979

Townsend, Peter, "Poverty in the United Kingdom", Pelican Books 1979
see also:-
Child Poverty Action Group, "Rural Poverty", CPAG 1978

(21) For this year 1980-81, £140 million was allocated under the Urban Aid programme, and £20 million under the partnership allocation. As a comparison, £18.4 million was the 1979-80 budget for expenditure by the Development Commission (the only government agency for the development of rural areas).
Sources: Central Office of Information, "Great Britain: an official handbook", H.M.S.O. 1980
and Development Commission, "Thirty-eighth report", H.M.S.O. 1980

(22) "Those not entirely familiar with the countryside often think of rural areas as traditional, and unchanging, slow moving. This could not be further from the truth. In fact, as you all know, the history of rural areas has been marked by continual change and, on occasion, major unheaval.

A state of flux is not new. It is therefore wrong to over-react to the pressures to which rural areas are now subject. Certainly I would resist demands for any massive injection of government or local authority assistance - even if it were available - which it is not."
Michael Heseltine, M.P., Secretary of State for the Environment Dec. 1980

(23) Campaign for Rural Youth, "Missed the Bus", CRY 1979

(24) Marsland, David, "Sociological Explorations in the Service of Youth", National Youth Bureau 1978